

Thoughts on Bob Dylan and some other things

Every time someone asks on one of the Bob forums what is the best Bob Dylan book, I always say On The Road With Bob Dylan because it's the only one that gives a clue of what Bob is like as a person and also because it's hysterically funny. Who else would have the chutzpah to ask Bob, "Is eyes on Sad Eyed Lady a noun or a verb?"

I've maintained for years that Bob Dylan is out of his mind, just fucking crazy. While as astounding as it was for him to actually talk for 25 minutes, the Musicares speech was a bunch of shit. Both the comments about Haggard and Tom T (whose wife had just died) pissed me off in a big way. And this is typical Bob. When he did talk about the sources for his songs, he picked all the WRONG sources. Then again this is a guy who goes to the library to look up old Time magazines of all things so he can write a book on his own life.

Way back in '69, my friend Dave Gershen who would later sing in that band Borderline said to me, "I think Dylan's reached a place where his dreams and reality are all one."

Bob Dylan's Voice

The vocal thing – it's really all about when you came in. I came in pretty early, and I saw him with Levon and the Hawks from the first row. I know it's not going to get better than that no matter how great he is. I have friends who are lot younger than me, and they view him from where they came in, so they will marvel at some version of a song from the Never Ending Tour where I'll be like it's okay, but this one's way better.

Meeting Bob Dylan

I did shake Bob's hand once at the Songwriters Hall of Fame induction. After his portion of the ceremony was over, he left his table and all of a sudden I realized most of the other journalists who were seated in the balcony were gone. I went down the ballroom lobby, and he was giving an interview (said Just Like A Woman was his favorite song).

After the interview he was standing there with Jacques Levy like seven feet away, and I'm like should I, shouldn't I - this will never happen again. So I walked over and shook his hand and said, "Bob, my brother Tony Brown says hello." And he just looked at me and

he has these piercing blue eyes. Jacques Levy said, "Good bass player." And I walked away. It was probably ten seconds if that, but it seemed like a lot longer.

Interviewing Bob Dylan

I always wanted to do the one interview no one ever did with Bob, the music interview. No one ever asks him (this was when he was still playing) about guitars and clearly he has a lot of guitars. No one talks about the changes in his harp style. When he started all the music critics like Robert Shelton talked about Woody and Sonny Terry in terms of harp, but I realized about 20 or 30 years ago, the guy who really influenced him on harp was Jimmy Reed.

Alan Lomax, Pete Seeger and the key to Time out of Mind

I also have this record (and Bob is clearly into records) my mom bought when I was a kid that's an Alan Lomax album with Peggy Seeger, Guy Carawan and maybe some other people. This record was key when Time Out Of Mind came out and a bunch of people were trying to figure out the sources of all the lines in "Trying To Get To Heaven" which is almost entirely composed of lines from old folk songs. I was the one who got the Riding In A Buggy With Mary Jane line, because Peggy Seeger sings the song on that album. But there's a bunch of other songs on this one album that either he covered or used lines from, so I would love to just say, "You ever see this record?"

I was in the audience at Wolf Trap in '97 when Bob acknowledged that Lomax was in the audience and paid him a real nice compliment. A moving moment.

When I was a kid my dad gave me "American Ballads" which is one of the albums on the coffee table in that Jakob Dylan Laurel Canyon movie. It was because of that album that when Bob did Hollis Brown the first time I saw him (before Times as out) that I knew he got the melody from Pretty Polly. But my point is on those songs Seeger was just playing and seeing and not being particularly political and you could see what a good singer and player he was when he wanted to be.

You think it's gonna get better than that?

As to Bob, I've seen him 140 times and really don't need to see him again. My attitude despite a million reviews of Never Ending Tour

shows is I saw him from a front row center seat with Levon & The Hawks in 1965. Do you think it's gonna get better than that? Not that there haven't been some great concerts. The Rolling Thunder show I saw was amazing, the fall '81 tour was great and the real deal. But in comparison with a couple of exceptions like The Supper Club which was also great, the NET has been a tour of moments. Sometimes he'd hit it, sometimes not, and I suspect that's one of the reasons that he and Jeff Rosen have been really slow in putting stuff out, along with that they know everyone has the bootlegs. The last two times I saw Bob were so so. The 2nd show at The Tower here in 2017 was really good where he was pretty much on from the first note and clearly having fun throughout. It was a luck of the draw. The show the night before wasn't anywhere near as good.

Bob's bands

When Larry Campbell finally came on board, (and I barely knew about him before that), I was like FINALLY, a real lead player, one who plays country on the country stuff and blues on the blues stuff. These days Campbell can't help but be sarcastic when mentioning Bob at his shows.

Larry and Charlie easily. But I also really like Donnie Herron. I didn't like GE Smith. Yeah he can play fast and is technically proficient, but he has zero taste, no sense of tone, plays the same fucking thing no matter what the song.

My favorite Bob guitarists remain Bloomfield and Robbie. While their styles and approach were different, the one thing they did was play off the lyrics.

Concert etiquette

I agree with Bob about the camera and phone shit too. Almost all my Bob reviews mention assholes in the audience who usually sit right near me.

It's totally ridiculous. Of course I'm old school. But when I first went to concerts including the early Bob concerts, you shut up during the song, and at most you whispered between songs. Somewhere along the line people got this ludicrous notion of it's a rock concert, I can do what I want. Well Bob never was a fucking rock concert. My favorite

line now 'cause it usually works, which I stole off a Facebook group called "Shut Up While The Band Is Playing" is: "Is Bob Dylan

interrupting your conversation?" It works a lot better than shut the fuck up because the offender has to think about it.

All that said, Bob's latest move of raising the lid on the grand piano is beyond the beyond. :)

But yes, I do realize the pressure he's under. Around '99 and for the next few years afterwards, I had this little group of obsessed fans. They were all Bob fans and I almost wrote a song about it called "Substitute Bob." They would watch all my moves online, sometimes invent phony personalities to get my attention, and all kinds of other stuff. Made me nuts, and I immediately thought of when Bob had to wait until 2 in the morning to show up at the Gaslight to see his friends, and how he couldn't go to a restaurant. I was like multiply what I'm feeling by a couple of million and have it go on for 40 or 50 years, and I'd get how nuts Bob is. I mean the guy can't go to a fucking funeral because it will become about him instead of the person who died.

How to listen to Planet Waves

Several years ago I decided the best way to listen to Planet Waves is to play Side 2 first so the album begins and ends with Forever Young)

The Trilogy....

I also don't view Love and Theft and Modern Times as a pair. I view Love and Theft as Dylan's most autobiographical album and also his end of the century album, especially if you view centuries as some people do with ending on the zero.

I also don't think Dylan's written a truly great song, meaning from his heart and his guy since Love And Theft. I don't feel inclined to sing any of them, and the ones I did feel inclined to sing didn't say with me very long.

Clinton Heylin, Blood on the Tracks

While Tony said Heylin basically didn't misquote him, as usual with Heylin, he always manages to put stuff in a different context than how it was originally said, and also added things Tony didn't necessarily feel at the time. At some point Heylin insinuates that Tony was petrified by Dylan and Tony said that was never the case at all. Also instead of going by what Tony said, Heylin insists the session logs were correct. Both Ellen Bernstein and Tony say that Buddy Cage was at the sessions and Heylin insists he overdubbed his parts later. (Tony says that doesn't mean that Cage or Griffin were called back for overdubs.) But Tony says the "You're A Big Girl Now" with Griffin and Cage was done live in the studio, and that while he never met Buddy Cage before, he certainly knew who he was, and was introduced to him at the sessions. (Tony would have known who he was first from the Ian & Sylvia "Great Speckled Bird" album, which I bought when it came out and played for him.) So he was annoyed by shit like that. Also he didn't like the way Heylin writes and immediately picked up on the pompous thing that you and I have discussed. I also mentioned to him (which he picked up on) Heylin's habit of constantly slipping song lyrics or titles into his sentences which in the case of this little book he takes to the max. Another example of this is when he talks about Dylan and Bernstein taking a night off to go see Little Feat at the Bottom Line, and the sentence is something like "He went to see the rock and roll doctor."

In other words, constantly showing off how hip he thinks he is. The book barely goes into the Minneapolis stuff, and the end of the book is quotes from other people (as well as some music critics) about how much better the NY sessions were. Now brother stuff aside, just going on my own journalistic instincts, if I was interviewing the one musician that was there for almost the entire thing, and they said the session logs weren't necessarily correct, I would have made that the crux of my story instead of saying well the musicians memory may be fooling him. In this

case, Tony's pretty much told me the same thing for 40 years. When the issue of Griffin overdubs came up on the Dylan newsgroup more than 20 years ago, I immediately called Tony who said, "He was right next to me in the studio." When I found out last February that the box was finally going to come out and contacted Tony, who had the session info in the Dylan book, "All The Songs," and I also sent him to Olof's "About Bob Dylan" site, the first thing he said to me was, "That's not the way I remember it going down." On top of that, when "The Cutting Edge," came out, I questioned Jeff about a couple of dubious takes or listing of musicians and Jeff pretty much admitted to me that sometimes they were just guessing about who played what on what track. Basically my feeling is Columbia doesn't do the greatest record keeping. When Jeff asked me to write the notes for what eventually was named "Tell Tale Signs," the first thing I asked for was the session credits for "Time Out Of Mind." They didn't have them! When doing the track by track, I wanted to be able to say (for instance) who the dobro player was on "Red River Shore," etc, In that case it could have been Cindy Cashdollar, Bucky Baxter or Lanois, but since I couldn't be sure, I didn't say it. I also asked for the dates for the live stuff, which Jeff also didn't have. Jeff didn't seem to think it was important, but I told him, "The fans are gonna go nuts if the dates aren't on the album. I was eventually able to figure it out by describing the tracks to a couple of heavy duty fans since I wasn't able to play them the tracks, which I thought showed how good my descriptive prowess is. :) I said shit like, "he coughs after the 3rd verse of Cocaine. For the jazzy version of "Tryin' To Get To Heaven," I had that complete tour on CDs. It still wasn't easy. As much as people think Bob plays things different every night, when you're listening to 20 versions of the same song, you have to find something that makes the track a little different. In this case, it was a lick Larry was doing on guitar that was in one part of the song. Of

course
it was on the last CD I checked out.

Joan Baez deserves the Nobel Prize

When I was a kid, and I'm talking around 1960, one of my aunts had Baez' first album, and then Tony got the 2nd one and the third one, "In Concert." My first time seeing her (and Tony's too) was at Bob's Halloween show at Philharmonic. The next day we went to the first Broadside Hoot at the Village Gate, and saw Ochs, Andersen, LaFarge, Len Chandler, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Tom Paxton, Julius Lester, Pete Seeger (who I'd seen a few times before), and Ramblin' Jack also stopped by and I might've left some people out. That still was one of the most amazing musical weekends I ever had and its effect on me was huge. I later went to a solo Baez show, though I can't remember where it was, but saw her at various peace rallies including one with Martin Luther King at the original Madison Square Garden when it was on (I think) 23rd Street. I then saw her on the Rolling Thunder Review at the Hartford show, and went to see her in the '80s (or maybe '90s) here.

I was lucky enough to be on Vanguard's mailing list when they reissued her first six Vanguard albums (through Farewell Angelina), the set, Rare, Live and Classic. The additional liner notes led to me corresponding with and eventually being online friends with Arthur Levy. And I still prefer those six Vanguard albums to anything else she's done. One she started using bands on her records, well not to be Clinton Heylin, but I wished I was producing. :) Of all the songs she wrote, "Diamonds and Rust" is by far the standout. I cannot listen to her version "Fennario" (In Concert, Part 2), without playing it again, and probably again after that. Something about her guitar part gets me every time.

It used to drive me nuts when Bob fans would put her down on various forums for any number of reasons, all really stupid. I loved the documentary on her -- the scenes of her in Vietnam were chilling, and I returned to that super early clip of her singing "Barbara Allen" tons of times.

Her farewell appearance here happened right around the time I got sick, and was a little too much to deal with. Plus when I checked out her new album on First Listen and heard the change in range in her voice which had been happening for awhile, my basic thought was, she's doing the right thing. But as a person, as someone who never gave up the fight, what a person. Several years ago, when a lot of people started campaigning for Pete Seeger to get the Nobel Peace Prize, my reaction was, no the musician who really deserves it is Joan Baez.

A little more on Joan and then Phil Ochs

I'd be willing to bet Dixie Down was the bigger hit for sure. I have a feeling she hasn't done There But For Fortune for decades. Btw, as a slight contrast in upbringing, the first peach march I went on (in Newark, NJ) of all places, my parents took me and the rest of the family. It was right when Bringing It All Back Home came out, and my dad got pissed 'cause I snuck off to the record store across the street from the park where the protest was. My 2nd was a month or so later, the first anti-Vietnam March on Washington and I went with a friend who was a year older than I was (so we were 14 and 15). We took a train hired by whoever put the March on that I believe had started in Boston. There were a bunch of kids on the train and we'd march through all the cars singing protest, civil rights and peace songs. Danny Kalb was on the train. Now he's a rightwing fuckhead. :) We walked from the train station to the mall and when I got to the top of the hill they went down to the stage where all the speakers were, Phil was onstage singing "I Ain't Marchin' Anymore." I ran down that hill really fast.

Bloomfield/Robbie/Blonde on Blonde

I can't remember if we discussed this before. I've read this new book on Blonde On Blonde called Thin Wild Mercury Sound. It's not bad and a fast paced read. Anyway in talking about the (ta da) NY Sessions the writer mentions Bloomfield being at the January '66 sessions. Now this caused confusion way back on the Bootleg Series/No Direction Home soundtrack where they supposedly had a Leopard Skin Pillbox Hat with Bloomfield. And on The Cutting Edge, it lists Bloomfield as being at the January '66 sessions, which I'm sure is what the writer is basing his info on.

To all of that I say, WTF, does anybody have ears? I love both Bloomfield and Robertson, but they had two different very distinct styles of playing. Bloomfield played these incredible mind boggling runs where upon hearing them you just say holy shit, how the fuck does he do that? Robbie on the other hand played in these short dynamic energetic bursts of explosive sound. But you'd be hard pressed to find a guitar run in any of his leads. And of course they both played with different guitar tones.

Aside from that, having read more than one Bloomfield bio, and having read several of his interviews in addition to hearing some on the radio, I was under the impression that once Mike turned down Bob for the '65 fall tour, that was it for a long time (though there is a picture of them backstage at the Guthrie Memorial concert at Carnegie Hall in 1968. I distinctly remember Bloomfield saying in an

interview that Bob has this thing about loyalty. So anyway (no great rush) sometimes check out those January '66 sessions and tell me if you hear Bloomfield 'cause I sure don't.

The Gospel according to Bob Dylan

I probably booed, and didn't listen to Bob after that for almost a year. It took everything in me not to shout out, "What happened to the 'Chimes of Freedom,' Bob?" He simply did not sway me at the show. It took me 30 years to get a copy of that show, and it wasn't as bad as I thought at the time. And of course I knew exactly what I was going to see.

Sometime very early in 1981, a friend of mine who was not a huge Bob fan calls me up, and says, "You have to come to my parent's house right away. My friend Joel Bernstein is here and he has a tape of a new Bob song that you of all people have to hear." My friend went to high school with Bernstein. Well, his parent's house was in the suburbs and at the time I didn't have a car, but I borrowed one. So what Joel (who was a really nice guy) had was "Every Grain Of Sand," the demo with Jennifer Warnes and the dog. He said, "You can't have it, but I'll play it as many times as you want." I probably made him play it like ten times. I ended up talking to him until some ridiculous hour like 3 am. He went back to SF and scored me a bunch of Bob boots from 1978 that you couldn't get on the East Coast at the time. I didn't hear that version of Every Grain Of Sand again until the first Bootleg Series came out.

Because Chimes of Freedom is about just that freedom, and is like a long list of various types of people in search of freedom, and what he said in the San Francisco rap was the opposite of that.

I didn't have a problem with the songs. I loved Slow Train (the

album) when
it came out because the singing was so intense and I'd kind of been
expecting it since John Wesley Harding along with certain songs on
The
Basement Tapes. At the same time there were certain lines on
some of the
songs on Slow Train (not so much on Saved) that were really
annoying and
some cases stupid ("Sheiks walking around with gold rings" etc.)
What was a
drag was that he went with the right wing version of Christ, instead
of say
the Catholic Worker version. :) Saved of course wasn't as good,
and you
kind of nail why in your article. I panned the shit out of it when it
came
out, then a few years later found myself liking it. Well I always liked
Pressing On and the harp on What Can I Do For You, and am
probably the only
person in the world who realizes that on Are You Ready he got as
close
harp-wise to Little Walter he he was ever gonna get. :)

Have you ever seen Passolini's "The Gospel According To Saint
Matthew?"
Great fucking film. I went to see it with Ray Benson on Christmas
Eve in
'68. It's in grainy black and white like Dont Look Back, and Jesus is
not
wimpy divine Hollywood bullshit. He's tough and a radical, but it's
all
straight out of the Gospel, and it has great music like Blind Willie
Johnson
and Odetta and the Missa Luba along with Bach. Anyway, it was
almost
enough to make a Commie Atheist Jew like me believe. And if Bob
had gone
more along those lines, I would've been a lot happier. But both Van
and
Arlo also put out Christian themed albums at that time. At least Bob
didn't
go on any of the Christian TV shows like Maria Muldaur and
McGuinn. I once
heard McGuinn on some Christian talk radio show that I used to
listen to for
comedy. It was with someone totally awful like Pat Robertson or
someone
like that. And they're asking him what Jesus did for him and he said,
"Well, one time I was doing a recording session and I was really late,

and
so as I'm driving I'm praying to Jesus, and when I got to the studio,
there
was a parking space right in front."

I've had theory about Bob for awhile that he falls in love with every woman he meets.

On GE Smith years

There was stuff to like and some interesting transitions happened like going right from Most Of The Time into Watchtower. The acoustic stuff was great, but again Smith plays pretty much the same thing on every song. He may know Pretty Peggy-O, but he doesn't know what to do with it. I believe that was the only time it was just Bob with another guitar player with the exception of Bruce Langhorne on the Les Crane show. The thing I dug about Robbie (and Bloomfield too) was Robbie would respond to the lyrics. I never get the feeling GE is responding to the lyrics.

Sweetheart Like You

I have a crazy theory that the woman in "Sweetheart Like You" is the Statue of Liberty.

Bob on Denny

If you go to Boblinks and find my reviews from the time he was in the band, I often tried to explain what I thought he was doing. A hell of a lot of Bob fans hated him. Ultimately for me, I don't think he was the right guitar player for Bob. I saw Stu when he was the lead guitar player and though I understand his role in the band, I thought he was a good lead player and every once in awhile he still does play lead. Sexton can be great when Bob lets him play. My favorite Bob guitar players are Bloomfield and Robbie.

Bloomfield and Duke

I swear Bob has always been looking for the Bloomfield replacement, and Robillard might have been it. I saw him twice - check out the Bethlehem PA show from that tour - last truly great Bob show I saw. He was supposed to be on TOOM, but Lanois replaced all his tracks.

What happened was and there's a video on one of the songs at I think Atlanta, Robillard took a solo got into it, and kept soloing, meanwhile Bob's staring right at him and he doesn't notice. Bob reamed him out after the show and he walked. Bob tried to apologize, but it was too late. Later that night or the next day he posted on Facebook he was selling all his Dylan records.

On Bob, The Band, Robbie

Actually Bob is quite a good businessman. Where he fucked up was not reading the contract he signed, plus Albert had a kickback scheme going on, but what's interesting is Bob stayed friends with the guy who was complicit in the kickback scheme. Grossman was an interesting and complicated person and one of the great bargainers and also quite eccentric. Different musicians had different reactions to how Grossman handled them. Gordon Lightfoot thought he was a genius, as did Artie Traum (of Happy & Artie Traum). Odetta couldn't stand to hear his name. What Grossman did for most of his artists was get them out of clubs and onto the concert stage.

Levon sang the shit out of most songs he touched on his stuff with The Band and sometimes on his solo albums, the best of which is Dirt Farmer. But even there, he (and Larry Campbell) tried to copyright a song, in fact the title song, they thought was traditional but was actually written by one of the New Lost City Ramblers. When Levon quit on Bob, Robbie did kind of take over The Band, which Levon probably resented. But if Levon had run The Band, they would've ended up going back to being a bar band and doing covers. They would've been the greatest bar band in the world, but they would have been a bar band.

Robbie knew how great they were and what they were capable of and he pushed them to achieve that greatness. He was hoping Richard Manuel would also write songs (like he did on Big Pink), but Manuel was just too fucked up. But Robbie who was probably writing songs before Bob Dylan started writing songs unlike Levon paid attention to the music scene and knew that for the group to make their mark they needed original material. Levon probably would've been just as happy singing "Summertime Blues" and "Stuff You Gotta Watch." So he wrote songs to make them great.

There's a story Patti Smith tells about going to Woodstock in 1970 to visit Todd Rundgren, and meeting the guys in The Band at various parties, all except Robbie. Where was Robbie? Robbie was in the studio working on Stage Fright. My brother moved to Woodstock in the spring of 1969. The first thing the guys in his band told me was "Every week, another Band car wrecked at the gas station." One

night about 3 am, my brother hears someone knocking on the door of his house. He goes and answers it. It was Richard Manuel who had just wrecked another car.

And I know about evil banks and bankruptcy.

Look, there's times when I see Robbie on TV or something that I just want to pummel him. :) I attempted to interview Manuel once. Let's just say there was nobody home. I felt really bad for him. I've felt for years mainly from having seen The Band at the beginning and going to every show I could (of the original group) that Manuel was the MAIN reason Robbie ended The Band because Richard simply couldn't cut it on stage anymore. The Band (at their best) was one of the tightest groups I ever saw, up there with Booker T & The MGs or James Brown's bands, and I think Robbie felt if we can't go out there and be our best, why the fuck are we doing this?

That said, there were things about "The Last Waltz" meaning the film as opposed to the concert itself that were annoying like the various intros to the guests. The best intro and the most appropriate was having Ferlinghetti before Bob. But the rest was kind of bullshit. The thing was all the people at the show some or all of them had worked with at some point. Rick and Levon did some recording as well as a concert with Neil Young. Robbie played on Joni Mitchell's Court and Spark. Most of them were on Clapton's No Reason To Cry. Levon was the force behind the "Muddy Waters In Woodstock" album. Levon had worked with Dr. John and Rick had recorded with Emmylou who wasn't at the show. So the only people they hadn't worked with in the film (not the concert) were the Staples. But I always felt that wouldn't it have been just as impressive if they said and then we worked with whoever. Also Tura Lura should've been in the fucking movie, at the concert it was the intro to Van. My other big bitch with both concert and movie was where the fuck was John Hammond Jr.? Robbie, Levon and Garth played on his album So Many Roads and Robbie and Rick played on I Can Tell.

Time out of Mind, Oh Mercy, TTS

One of the things I want to hear in the archives is the Jim Dickinson mix for "Time Out Of Mind." My problem with Lanois in general is he is always making Daniel Lanois records no matter who the artist is. I suspect Dylan had more of a bluesy album in mind.

The good thing about "Oh Mercy" was he kind of made Bob work (maybe) when he might not have been inclined to do so. With Toom, when you read about all the production technological bullshit he put songs through to obtain a blues (meaning kind of a Chess or

Sun Records) sound, Bob achieved that sound without all the bullshit on "Love And Theft." I think the spooky songs are because Bob writes spooky songs, simple as that whether for the Basement Tapes, Time Out of Mind or any other album that has spooky songs.

When I was working on what was later named Tell Tale Signs, I remember one night around 4:30 AM deciding to go back to the original (well the remastered version) of "Most of the Time" just to compare and since it was that time I had headphones on and I couldn't believe the amount of echo. Only one song and I'd have to go back and consult my notes or maybe one of Jeff's emails on Tell Tale Signs is a Lanois mix. But there's little doubt in my mind that Lanois is why Dylan decided to produce himself.

Dylan and bridges..

It was something I was thinking about for the book. Dylan's first use of a bridge was "Thin Man," then he got into it big time on Blonde On Blonde, abandoned it for the Basement Tapes and JWH except for I'll Be Your Baby, had some on Nashville, New Morning and Planet Waves, abandoned it again for Blood and Desire (though Rita Mae might have one), got back into it on Street Legal, and again on Infidels, but the idea isn't really panning out, because he eventually does come back to using them.

Ray Benson, Bob and Tiny Paycheck

So Ray went to see Bob on the last tour in Austin and he shows up at sound check and is walking to the stage to say hi to Tony and finds that Bob is walking right next to him, and Bob says something like "Hey Ray, how's the play going" (meaning their play about Bob Wills, "Ride With Bob" which was the last thing they were talking about the last time they met which might have been seven years ago). So Ray says to Jeff Kramer, Bob just picked right up from our last conversation seven years ago, and Kramer goes, "Yeah, he does that."

Haggard is really pissed at him over that speech.

So I said, who do you think is crazier, Dylan or Van? (Ray knows Van. When they moved to California from West VA, Van dug them immediately and mentioned them in Rolling Stone and the record companies came running.) So Ray says, "Tough call, but Bob has a longer history of being crazy." Ray said Bob's whole thing is not

being who he was before. Whoever he was before no longer exists. Of course before could be yesterday.

Of course Sara Dylan said this almost 40 years ago during the divorce, when she said, "It was like living with a different person every day," a statement I've always believed.

Tony's nickname in the band is Tiny Paycheck (probably because his pay is the opposite). So somehow Bob found out the other guys call him that and Bob says to Jeff Kramer, "Is Tony unhappy with his pay?"

Ray knows Merle, has known him for years. He's toured with him, and the original Wheel piano player Floyd Domino now plays with Merle. Bob walked back his comments on Haggard. Bob wasn't commenting on what Hag said in interviews, but what he thought years ago. Most childish and stupid thing he's done, ruining an otherwise good speech sort of.

When Suze Rotolo wrote her book, I'd hoped she would do a little book tour with readings and do one here. Sometimes readings have question and answer sessions. But even if it had just been a signing, I would have gone. And what I would have said to her, after telling her that I went to Kinderland (which would have immediately let her know where I was coming from) was to ask if Bob ever said how much he liked Goldwater. :)

One thing I found very interesting about the Maymudes book (and I sort of knew this but verified it before writing my review) is that early on Bob surrounded himself with people who to put it mildly were VERY left wing, Suze and Victor. Victor's older brother also went to Kinderland!!!!

So you know that little quote of mine from that book that appeared in newspapers around the world, on one level I've always wondered whether the Goldwater statement in Chronicles is just that, fucking with his fans.

I could also say the same thing about his statements (I think they were in Chronicles) about the Kingston Trio.

What I do know it's not just his fans he fucks with, it's his friends as well and sometimes it's just hysterical. I think it's a thing he got into when he was really young and he just could never stop doing it.

But and I'm sure I've told you this before, my two favorite examples are Van Ronk telling him to read Rimbaud, Dylan responding with an idiotic "Huh!?", and Van Ronk going to his apartment, finding a copy of Rimbaud's Complete Works with handwritten annotations in the margins. Then ten years later Lowell George meets Dylan and George asks, Do you ever listen to Jackson Browne, receives an answer along the lines of who's that, then is invited to Dylan's house the same day, and is in the room with Dylan's albums and while Dylan goes out of the room to take a phone call, checks out Bob's record collection which includes every Jackson Browne album out at the time. :)

True. I'm saving the Van Ronk/Lowell stuff for the book, it's part of the whole premise.

Shelter From The Storm

But here's the thing and I've probably told you this 9,000 times, the best Shelter is the one on the album. He's never touched it. It just has that magic mystical thing where it's like in another dimension. Do I like some others? Occasionally. I kind of like Budokan 'cause it's so weird. The one on Hard Rain is sort of cool because he's so pissed off, but he plays like the worst sounding slide ever in the history of slide. :-D It's like what the fuck is he fucking doing? Then there's the ridiculous speeded up 78 Shelter from late summer and fool where the backup singers sing from the storm then thousand and two times after each verse while Bobby does supreme over emoting to the point of it being like some topsy turvy clown caught robbing a Bob Dylan store in the middle of Hollywood Boulevard or maybe in the dismal start struck streets of Las Vegas. But the rest of those versions and I've seen him sing it in preacher tents in the woods of North Jersey and in one time movie halls and dance palaces he never gets the melody right, he just doesn't. It's like well I think if kinda sorta goes something like this maybe somewhere in the memory of my forlorn mind I might actually remember it if the right cloud passes by next Tuesday, but I probably won't, but I know I wrote it about something though I might remember what that is on Thursday if the stars are all in line and the moon ain't too cloudy, but until then here's something that might be what I thought it is.

Sexton and Campbell

are so over rated it's not even funny anymore. When Campbell joined the band everyone hated him. "He's not doing anything, he can't play," blah blah blah and same thing with Sexton initially.

Some people, probably a lot of people like them because they were eye candy.

Of the two Sexton as a guitarist is way more interesting and way more driven.

Campbell is a good guitarist. But no better nor worse than tons of similar guitarists who study the great guitarist and learn from them. What made Campbell stand out initially was he was so much better than his two predecessors on the Never Ending Tour. The first one played the same exact thing on every song no matter what, the one that came after was just lame. Larry played country country, blues blues and so on and what made him interesting and special was he could play a mess of instruments. But basically he knew what to do. But I've had guys in my band or playing with me such as Bob Jay, Jim Fogarty and Larry Broido who were every bit as good as Larry Campbell if not better. Several things he brought into the mix like the riff on Tangled and later on the rearranged Girl From North Country which is still the arrangement and I'm sure it's him were interesting at first but now bore the shit out of me. I am so glad they finally dropped that idiotic riff on Tangled, chreeist.

My attitude towards Campbell was finally, a lead guitarist who knows what to do. But if Bob had hired Steve Bruton way back in 1990, he would've have one then too.

Those who say Denny Freeman is paint my numbers as a guitarist are morons because he is anything but a standard guitar player. He is coming from somewhere else entirely. This does not necessarily mean what he does is right for Bob Dylan's music.

I've seen tons of boring shows on the Never Ending Tour, and that means every fucking year. Lots of 'em. The whole thing is so over rated it's ridiculous. The only show I saw that came close to what he's really capable of was the Supper Club. The rest had their moments and some had no moments.

The best band Bob Dylan ever had was and always will be the Band followed by the various gospel bands. Rolling Thunder was lots of fun as a show, but the band was well a joke. The NET has always been about Bob Dylan learning to lead a band, but I'm saving that for the book if I ever write it.

The Book I intend to write

It will start with what I wrote but enhanced on Bob Dylan.com and continue in that style, on up through the first six albums and the crash.

Then there will be a brief section on the other music that happened the rest of '66 and '67.

Then John Wesley Harding and the Basement Tapes, the chapter on the Basement Tapes dealing with the initial 12 songs (or whatever amount it was) and how the rest dribbled out over the next 40 years until finally they released the whole thing. The Basement Tapes to me is key.

Then Nashville Skyline through New Morning taking into account the recent Self Portrait/New Morning revelations, also including the Isle of Wight concert and of course Bangla Desh. Then how Planet Waves was the bridge after New Morning he had to cross over to get to Blood On The Tracks, but then (like he did with Nashville Skyline) went in a whole other direction with Desire leading to RTR, but going into how the spirit of the initial RTR fell apart in '76, followed by a year of silence mainly because of the divorce.

Then the Christian period and working his way back into his own songs, pointing out that the Gospel band was one of the best bands he ever had and how he seemed to find himself in '81, which led to another year of silence before returning with Infidels, but going into how we'll never know how great Infidels could have been because he wouldn't let Knopfler finish what he started. Then the basically meaningless European Tour of '84 followed by Empire Burlesque in '85, and how this was the first time he listened to the critics setting out to make a modern album but basically failing. This will be followed by the nadir of the Petty tour, Knocked Out Loaded, Down In the Groove and the Dead tour, and how the Dead rehearsals were way better than the shows, and how most importantly they reminded him of songs he'd written but forgotten. There will also be the downside of the Dead tour, leading to him thinking he was a lead guitarist, the beach ball atmosphere of Dead shows, but also sort of a strategic move on his part trying to attract and capitalize on the Dead audience.

Then Oh Mercy and the plusses and minuses of Lanois. Then the beginning of the Never Ending Tour in combination with the Wilburys and then Under the Red Sky and how Don Was was the wrong choice, but mainly because Was didn't realize that Dylan works best in the studio once there's a core group of musicians and by having different musicians on each session, Dylan was never able to get the all important groove going. Then more on the NET, not always complimentary of course touching on the total nadir of '91 and working his way back through the two acoustic albums pretty much coming back at the Willie Nelson b-day show and then at the Supper Club. This point is when a lot of the concert reviews will start coming into play though I did not review every show I saw. Then more on the NET and how a large part of it was about Dylan learning how to lead a band. He didn't have to lead the

Hawks. He didn't have to lead Petty. The for lack of a better word gospel band was all top notch players who knew what to do and Drummond and Keltner were key to that. Then on up through Time Out Of Mind, and of course how he kept bringing songs into the mix from Wheels On Fire to Blind Willie etc and into TOOM. For TOOM, among other things I will have to go to Tulsa to the archives (Jeff has promised me the non public access) to hear the Jim Dickinson version of TOOM.

Then into the bluegrass period which also lead to the sort of country swing period (again this is where reviews come into play) and into Love and Theft. And how he could have simply ended everything right there.

And from there how it's becoming apparent that what he's really into at this point is exploring American Music, but also how the cut and paste method has overtaken his writing, and how the great quotable lines are not necessarily great quotable Bob Dylan lines because he copped them from somewhere else. Somewhere in there will be Masked And Anonymous, but also examining as we learned from Telltale that a lot of songs, and even more lines he had for a long time, trying them out in various places until he found a home for them. And on up through the basic nothingness of Together Through Life, to Tempest and the Sinatra stuff. And while Tempest shows some signs of getting away from cut and paste (maybe), there's an uninviting nasty edge to many of the songs ultimately reaching the conclusion that Dylan hasn't been able to (or maybe doesn't want to) connect with that place deep within (in terms of his original songs) since Time Out Of Mind and some of the songs on L&T, for instance Sugar Baby. And again, in this part this is where the reviews will be key in Dylan working through vocal problems - was the hideous Wolfman growl in 03 his Charlie Patton phase or was his voice totally fucked up and how on one level the last two albums are him proving to himself that he can sing again when he wants to, and key to this is the recent Charlie Sexton quote about how the volume of the band got lower over the past 10, 15 years, something pointed out in my reviews.

On Street Legal

As you probably know Street Legal was recorded at his rehearsal space in Santa Monica with a mobile truck unit. I actually love the sax in Changing despite the obvious Bruceness about it. The album got a bad rap in the press thanks to Gruel Mucous. I once made a tape of it for car listening where I replaced most of the first side except changing with a live One Of Must Know from '78.

As I've probably told you, Waylon should've done "I Think We Better Talk This Over," it has his name all over it.

All the politically correct moroons got on his case about the cook and sew line in "Is You Love In Vain," but I on the other hand think it's great, I know exactly what he means. He is clearly so fucking devastated on that song. It also has one of my favorite lines of his: "When I am in the darkness, why do you intrude?" I used that line on the obsessed fan a lot.

I also think Senor is one of his greatest songs, totally apropos for now. The ultimate live version of that song is with that band, July 4, 1978 in Paris.

And then of course there's "Where Are You Tonight."